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# **Final Report**

## **Committee on Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness**

**July 23, 2013**

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Dear P-20 Council Members,

As much as we are heartened by the news that high school graduation rates continue to climb in Illinois, there remains a troubling deficit between high school completion and true college and career readiness. The cost of this deficit is extraordinary, to our students, and to our state as a whole. Thousands of students underprepared for the rigors of college must enroll in non-credit-bearing, remedial coursework, taking out loans to finance the learning of concepts they should have mastered in high school, not to mention the fact that students enrolled in remedial coursework are much less likely to finish their degrees. At the same time, countless positions remain unfilled across the state for lack of applicants with the proper qualifications and skillsets to be successful in the modern workplace. Illinois' competitiveness in the global market and students' future prosperity depend on our ability to address this deficit.

With this challenge in mind, the P-20 Council created the Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (PWR) Committee. Over the last year, agency, community and business leaders, and a wide array of education stakeholders have convened to define college- and career-readiness for the state, to review the academic and career initiatives already in place, and to discuss how to better align our education system and provide more work-based learning opportunities for students. The PWR Committee's work is intended to combine efforts linked to both the Common Core and the Illinois Pathways initiatives in order to ensure a comprehensive, efficacious statewide approach to college and career readiness. This report documents the PWR Committee's process and lays out its recommendations to propel the state toward the P-20 Council's goal of 60 percent of residents with high-quality degrees and credentials by 2025.

A piecemeal approach will not get us to this goal. A comprehensive effort is required to provide all students with better-coordinated and more relevant coursework and training, whether they are children just beginning to explore what they might like to do when they grow up, or adults returning for the degree or certificate that will increase their marketability and open new professional doors. This new approach must recognize core competencies and skill development as paramount for students.

In practice, this will mean engaging students with differentiated instruction and real world, work-based learning opportunities that bring to life a comprehensive definition of college and career readiness. We must provide students with coursework that integrates academic skills with relevant career training that will pique their interest and help them understand how what they learn today will allow them to realize their academic and post-academic goals. We have to do a better job of identifying struggling students and providing them with the supports to get them back on track. Improved student planning tools, concentrated efforts to make transitions within and from various education institutions more consistent and navigable, and more flexible credit acquisition can go a long way in improving degree attainment and career development. New technologies will both support these efforts and provide an impetus for innovation.

Finally, we know colleges and employers are ultimately interested not in whether students have put in the time, but rather if they have mastered the material and whether they are able to apply their knowledge and skills to address real-world challenges. A competency-based approach to education that incorporates student demonstration of the academic and non-academic skills they have acquired is the natural next step in our efforts to better prepare students for college and career.

Make no mistake, this is a tall order. Personalizing learning, supporting educators as they work to embed academic skills in career-oriented courses, and addressing learning deficiencies early so as to avoid the need for costly postsecondary remediation will not be easy, but this educational transformation is vital if we are to prepare our citizens for the careers of today and tomorrow. We hope that this report will serve to further the conversation about postsecondary and career readiness, as well as foster the collaboration that can see it through to fruition.

Sincerely,

John Rico

Robin Steans

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## POSTSECONDARY AND WORKFORCE READINESS IN ILLINOIS

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In our modern economy, postsecondary completion has proven to be increasingly vital to employability and wages.<sup>1,2</sup> The P-20 Council, charged with developing a seamless and sustainable statewide system of quality education and support from birth through adulthood, is working to maximize students' educational attainment, opportunities for success in the workforce, and contributions to their local communities. To these ends, the P-20 Council has set a goal: to increase the proportion of Illinoisans with high-quality degrees and credentials to 60 percent by the year 2025.

Today, only about 41 percent of the state's nearly seven million working-age adults (25-64 years old) hold at least a two-year degree. To meet the P-20 Council's goal, Illinois must better prepare its students for the rigors of postsecondary education, provide them with marketable skills and knowledge, and support their persistence through to degree or certificate completion. The health of our democracy and our economy depend upon our ability to equip our citizens with the tools they need to be successful. We cannot fail them.

### POSTSECONDARY AND WORKFORCE READINESS COMMITTEE

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The Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Steering Committee is a joint committee established by the P-20 Council to combine the efforts of the Subcommittee on College and Career Readiness and the Subcommittee on Data, Assessment and Accountability. The objectives of this Steering Committee are derived from the goals of the Subcommittee on College and Career Readiness, which include:

1. Defining "college and career readiness" for Illinois,
2. Aligning the P-20 curriculum and instruction to the Common Core State Standards and Illinois Pathways, and
3. Aligning assessments and certifications to college and career pathways.

Although its members hail from diverse sectors of government, education, and business, the PWR Committee's work in support of these three goals was rooted in a shared set of principles:

- College and career readiness cannot be reduced to a single metric, but must instead be understood as a multi-faceted set of knowledge, skills and abilities that allow students to successfully meet the challenges of college and career and live healthy, productive lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2013, May 22). *Employment Projections: Earnings and unemployment rates by educational attainment*. Retrieved June 26, 2013, from [http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep\\_chart\\_001.htm](http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Carnevale, A. P., Rose, S. J., & Hanson, A. R. (2012). *Certificates: Gateway to Gainful Employment and College Degrees*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University: Center on Education and the Workforce. Retrieved from <http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/Certificates.FullReport.061812.pdf>

- Raising academic standards through implementation of the Common Core, and expanding career education and opportunities through creation of Illinois Pathways programs,<sup>3</sup> are not divergent strategies, but rather mutually reinforcing ones that, when used together, provide all students with a wider range of individualized, contextualized, realistic, and enriching learning opportunities.
- Increased communication and collaboration across governmental, educational, and business entities must be leveraged to provide students with clear, consistent expectations, more navigable college and career preparation, and better targeted supports to meet individual student needs.

Following one year of research and substantive discussion, the PWR Committee seeks to share its best thinking about a realistic definition of college and career readiness, as well as recommendations for strategies that Illinois should explore to ensure that more of its citizens successfully complete postsecondary and build fulfilling careers. Given the scope and complexity of the task, this report should not be understood as an end in itself. It is instead intended to highlight where there is consensus among a diverse set of stakeholders, as well as to spur further policy discussion and innovation. The PWR Committee plans to share this report with the P-20 Council on July 24, 2013, so that it might be used to craft specific policy recommendations.

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## **STRUCTURE AND PARTICIPATION**

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The PWR Committee is directed by a Leadership Committee, which includes the P-20 Council Chair, Coordinator of the P-20 Leadership Committee, and Chairs of the P-20 Subcommittees on College and Career Readiness and the Subcommittee on Data, Assessment and Accountability; and representatives of the Illinois Board of Higher Education, Illinois Community College Board, Illinois State Board of Education, and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. The PWR Steering Committee includes faculty and leadership from four-year and community colleges; representatives from the Board of Higher Education Illinois and the Illinois Community College Board student advisory committees; teacher unions; management groups; district representation; and early education, business, and K-12 advocates. The complete list of P-20 participants can be seen in Appendix A.\*

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## **PROCESS**

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The PWR Committee met monthly or bimonthly since May 2012 and used interim surveys to reach consensus on issues not fully explored or resolved during meetings. The Committee developed a working model for college and career readiness and outlined a process to review transition points along the P-20 continuum. This framework includes transition points such as school to career, high school to postsecondary, middle school to

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<sup>3</sup> Further information about these two initiatives can be found in Appendix C.

\* All appendices are available in a separate PWR document, *Final Report Appendices*.

high school, and aims to align efforts in early education and elementary with the recommendations from this committee. Further information regarding the questions that guided research and discussion of initiatives and indicators is available in Appendix B.

The PWR Committee discussed a number of initiatives, including:

- Personalized learning plans
- Programs of study
- Illinois Articulation Initiative
- Early college credit opportunities
- High school requirements
- Remediation/developmental education reform efforts
- Common Core State Standards/PARCC
- On-track and early warning signs
- Bridging the Gap
- Illinois Shared Learning Environment
- Innovations in K-12 and postsecondary math

The PWR Committee also discussed educational issues facing student sub-demographics, including:

- English language learners
- Students with a disability or impairment
- Adult learners

These educational initiatives and issues were explored as they relate to college and career, high school, and middle school readiness.<sup>4</sup> Brief summaries of the PWR Committee's discussions regarding these initiatives and issues are available in Appendix C.

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## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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### FRAMING AND BENCHMARKING COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

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The focus on college and career readiness is ultimately about providing students with the tools they need to become healthy and productive citizens. With this goal in mind, readiness is necessarily multi-dimensional and is more complex than a simple cut score on assessments in math and language arts. No two students are the same and they will consequently have different areas in which they especially excel. Even so, both postsecondary and employers require that potential students and employees reach a certain level of competency across a range of domains in order to succeed in the classroom and the workplace.

With this in mind, the PWR Committee reviewed existing models of college- and career-readiness (including those of Achieve, Inc., the Association for Career and Technical

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<sup>4</sup> College affordability was discussed in the context of postsecondary and workforce readiness, but is a complex topic in its own right and warrants further research and discussion.

Education, the Education Policy Improvement Center, the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, and other states and countries). The Committee then developed its own model, which incorporates elements from the aforementioned models, as well as new elements developed through the Committee's own discussions. The framework that follows is a first step toward providing a comprehensive picture of the knowledge students must gain and the skills they must be able to demonstrate in order to be successful in postsecondary and career.

### A COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READINESS FRAMEWORK

<b>Core content knowledge &amp; skills</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Core academics tied to the Illinois Learning Standards, including the Common Core <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>English Language Arts</li> <li>Fine Arts</li> <li>Foreign Language</li> <li>Mathematics</li> <li>Science</li> <li>Social Science</li> </ul> </li> <li>Technical knowledge &amp; skills specific to career pathways &amp;/or</li> <li>Technical knowledge &amp; skills specific to in-depth academic pursuits</li> </ul>	<b>Employability &amp; interpersonal skills</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Civic awareness &amp; engagement</li> <li>Collaboration &amp; teamwork</li> <li>Communication</li> <li>Creativity</li> <li>Cultural competency</li> <li>Independence &amp; initiative</li> <li>Information, media, &amp; technology skills</li> <li>Leadership</li> <li>Ownership of learning &amp; results</li> <li>Self-management</li> </ul>
<b>Thinking skills</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Critical and applied thinking</li> <li>Data analysis &amp; interpretation learning techniques</li> <li>Formulating &amp; stating problems</li> <li>Research &amp; scientific method</li> </ul>	<b>College &amp; career knowledge &amp; navigation skills</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to transition to/within workplace and across the P-20 spectrum</li> <li>Financial literacy and its application to college &amp; career navigation</li> <li>Understanding of postsecondary system &amp; how to access</li> </ul>

### COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READINESS INDICATORS

The PWR Committee identified the following indicators of college and career readiness that could be used in support of the College- and Career-Readiness Framework. The Committee examined multiple transition points across the middle school to postsecondary and career spectrum and investigated and reviewed related initiatives and issues in order to:

- Understand how indicators are currently used, and
- Identify policies that could promote the alignment of a multi-tiered, multi-pathway approach to college and career readiness.



The following is not intended as an exhaustive list of indicators, nor is it the opinion of this Committee that all aspects of college and career readiness are quantifiable. There is value, however, in identifying tangible signs of readiness across the elements of the College- and Career-Readiness Framework. The following sources are a beginning set of sources for indicators that will allow the P-20 Council to continue the work of defining a set of tangible benchmarks on the college- and career-readiness continuum.

Student Indicator Sources	Institutional Indicator Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotions and advancement</li> <li>• Job persistence (workforce retention data)</li> <li>• Career acquisition</li> <li>• Work-study based observations (CPS employment assessment)</li> <li>• Technical certificates</li> <li>• National Career Readiness Certificate</li> <li>• Bachelor's degree</li> <li>• Associate's degree</li> <li>• General education core curriculum completion</li> <li>• Early college credit (dual credit, AP)</li> <li>• Academic persistence</li> <li>• Academic performance (PARCC, ACT, GPA, placement tests)</li> <li>• At-risk/early warning signs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mobility and transfer frequency</li> <li>○ Behavior issues</li> <li>○ School entrance age</li> <li>○ Absence rate</li> <li>○ Course failures</li> <li>○ Time before reaching English proficiency</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perkins</li> <li>• Community College and IBHE performance funding</li> <li>• K-12 report card</li> <li>• New teacher evaluations</li> <li>• Student indicators taken in aggregate</li> </ul>

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### **ALIGNING THE P-20 SYSTEM TO THE COMMON CORE AND PATHWAYS**

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Both the Common Core State Standards and Pathways, if implemented well, will support student development across the many skills necessary for college and career readiness. The Common Core should provide students with higher, clearer and deeper learning standards that emphasize the skills that students will need in the modern workplace: collaboration, critical thinking, communication and creativity.<sup>5</sup> It does, however, represent a major shift in the way we teach and the way students demonstrate mastery, so great care and effort will need to be made to ensure that it is implemented effectively. Successful implementation hinges on quality teacher and teacher-candidate training, significant

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<sup>5</sup> Achieve, Inc. (2012). *Common Core State Standards & Career and Technical Education: Bridging the Divide between College and Career Readiness*. Washington, D.C.: Achieve, Inc.

communication with parents and students about these new expectations, and targeted supports to help students and teachers through the transition to the Common Core and throughout its implementation. In addition, we must continue to leverage new technologies, as the state has done with the Illinois Shared Learning Environment, to allow teachers to more efficiently enable effective, personalized learning in the classroom.

The Illinois Pathways Initiative complements the Common Core by providing the opportunity for students to learn targeted college and career skills in a contextualized setting. In a world with ever-changing careers and opportunities, students must acquire skills that are transferrable across careers, but are often best learned when focused in a blended academic-work place environment tailored to student interest. Pathways are not intended to lock students into a specific trajectory, but rather to spark a career exploration process that will continue throughout a student's life. Students can use Pathways to explore opportunities, define goals, and learn to navigate our complex world, while learning the core content, thinking, and interpersonal skills necessary for success.

To implement Pathways programs effectively, integrate them fully with the Common Core, and use them to strengthen college *and* career readiness, many communities are implementing strategies that better align education and career pipelines. This Committee believes that this work is best done when communities engage a wide-spectrum of organizations in designing and implementing Pathways programs, including school districts, community colleges, community organizations, and the business community.

This engagement should lead to collaboration within and across district and regional organizations, agencies, and sectors. Planning at the regional level in particular provides a wider range of resources and should ensure greater alignment across and between the P-20 system and local industry. The state can buttress these efforts by providing tools that support the development of best-practice strategies.

Pathways are envisioned as a strategy to address the needs of *all* students, regardless of their plans after high school. Each and every student can benefit from contextualized learning, career exploration, internships, and job-shadowing. Successful implementation of Pathways will require collaboration between students, teachers, districts, and the community to define readiness for each Pathway. Effective programs will ensure that high school is more than an assorted collection of courses by fostering experiences that allow students to learn and demonstrate skills across the domains of college and career readiness.

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### **KEY SUCCESS FACTORS FOR POSTSECONDARY AND WORKFORCE READINESS**

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The following Key Success Factors represent those strategies that the PWR Committee believes are most crucial to ensuring that students are well-supported and successful as they navigate through a coherent and consistent P-20 system. The Key Success Factors are intended to:

- Frame the policy discussion at the state and local level to support rigorous, relevant, and realistic learning across the domains of college and career-readiness;
- Aid effective coordination and implementation of current state initiatives; and
- Serve as a template for organizing local policies and initiatives tailored to community needs, while still using a common language across the state.

Strategies developed at both the local and state level must support *all* students, while recognizing that additional resources must be provided to ensure the success of those students who have historically been disadvantaged due to factors including, but not limited to, economic, racial, gender, ability, and geographic barriers.

### **Key Success Factor #1 - Systemic Approach to Personalized Learning Plans<sup>6</sup>**

***Help all youth and adult learners create a personalized learning plan that will allow them to tailor their learning experiences to their areas of interest and career goals.***

- Develop a statewide approach to personalized learning plans (PLPs).
- Help all students begin to develop a personalized learning plan in middle school and use it to help guide them through high school and postsecondary to career.
- Ensure personalized learning plans support and integrate other intervention strategies.
- Support students to communicate with, maintain and adjust their personalized learning plans as needed, as their interests, career goals, and needs evolve.
- Provide students with meaningful counseling to help them develop their plans, including special attention to how geography, gender, race, and social class can falsely limit a student's sense of career possibilities.
- Involve the Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams for students with a disability or impairment in the development of personalized learning plans to ensure coordination between students' IEPs and PLPs.

### **Key Success Factor #2—High School Graduation and Support**

***Ensure high school graduation signifies readiness for college and career and provide support so students stay “on-track” to graduate.***

- Ensure high school graduation requirements include student demonstration of readiness for the challenges of college and career.

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<sup>6</sup> A personalized learning plan (PLP) leverages student interests and experiences to help shape course options and career exploration. A PLP is for all students and is entirely separate from an Individualized Education Program, though the two may work in tandem.

- Provide students who are having trouble or have fallen behind with the support they need to graduate.
- Provide students with multiple ways to meet graduation requirements and ensure that these options are high quality, tailored to their interests, and allow them to learn relevant skills in realistic settings.

### **Key Success Factor #3 - Postsecondary Alignment and Early College Credit**

***Ensure that expectations for students are consistent across high school and postsecondary and increase opportunities for students to earn college credit in high school.***

- Ensure students graduating from high school are prepared to enroll in postsecondary without remediation.
- Provide students with more consistent expectations by working to more closely align placement requirements across postsecondary institutions.
- Improve developmental options for students who are at-risk of failing a credit-bearing course in postsecondary.
- Improve communication between, and support throughout, secondary and postsecondary institutions, so that students receive consistent support and guidance, and develop the tools to self-identify and self-advocate.
- Ensure all students entering postsecondary receive the support necessary to navigate postsecondary and progress through credit-bearing coursework toward graduation.
- Increase opportunities for students to earn college credit in high school and streamline acceptance of said credit, so that students efficiently progress toward postsecondary graduation.

### **Key Success Factor #4 - Credit Acquisition**

***Allow for the development of innovative approaches to earn and transfer high school and postsecondary credit.***

- Develop more ways for students to earn credit by demonstrating their knowledge and skills in a given area, so that students may obtain credit for proficiencies acquired in nontraditional classes or settings.
- Ensure that more students have access to high-quality course options and career education tailored to their interests.

### **Key Success Factor #5 - Work-Based Learning<sup>7</sup>**

***Provide all students with career exploration opportunities and work-based learning options in middle school, high school, and postsecondary.***

- Inform students about a wide variety of career options, work-based learning opportunities, and the paths into and throughout postsecondary and career.
- Provide students with career exploration opportunities tailored to their areas of interest, as stated in their personalized learning plans.
- Support students in their understanding of how postsecondary can provide them with a broader array of career options.
- Create and support statewide work-based learning assessments.
- Incentivize the creation and expansion of work-based learning opportunities for students through direct engagement with employers.

### **Key Success Factor #6 - State and Local System Support**

***Foster ongoing engagement between K-12 and postsecondary institutions, education and business communities, and education and social service agencies, and ensure the proper governance structures and funding strategies to support collaboration.***

- Develop a funding strategy to implement career education and specialization through the Illinois Pathways program.
- Continue to develop a governance structure to support Illinois Pathways' ongoing development and implementation.
- Provide support for networks of postsecondary and workforce readiness collaboration at the local, regional, and state levels.

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<sup>7</sup> Work-based learning can include options such as career awareness, career exploration, career preparation, and on-the-job training. For greater detail, see the P-20 Council's College & Career Readiness Committee's September 16, 2011 Work-Based Learning Report.